

VZCZCXR07317

PP RUEHAG RUEHAST RUEHBI RUEHCI RUEHDF RUEHIK RUEHLH RUEHLN RUEHLZ

RUEHNNEH RUEHPW RUEHROV RUEHSK RUEHSR RUEHVK RUEHYG

DE RUEHAA #0209 0411305

ZNR UUUUU ZZH

P 101305Z FEB 09

FM AMEMBASSY ASHGABAT

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2307

INFO RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA PRIORITY 4825

RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING PRIORITY 2607

RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 2472

RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS PRIORITY

RHMFIUU/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY

RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY

RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY

RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC PRIORITY

RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY

RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY

RUEAWJA/DEPT OF JUSTICE WASHDC PRIORITY

RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL 3069

RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE 3333

RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC

UNCLAS ASHGABAT 000209

STATE FOR SCA/CEN, INL

SENSITIVE

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PGOV KCRM SOCI TX

SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN: ALL EYES ARE ON THE RED CAYENNE

¶1. (U) Sensitive but unclassified. Not for public internet.

¶2. (U) The first Porsche Cayenne V8 SUV, with a reported purchase price of \$93,000, has been seen cruising the streets of Ashgabat the past few weeks, attracting much attention. It is the first privately-owned vehicle of its kind - the first Porsche ever, in fact - to successfully get around the Government's unofficial restriction on the importation of high-priced, luxury cars.

¶3. (U) Owning expensive, imported cars had been effectively prohibited during the rule of late President Niyazov: There was an unwritten law that vehicles valued at more than \$50,000 could not receive customs clearance. The few luxury vehicles that somehow managed to evade the ban were later confiscated by the Ministry of National Security or the Prosecutor's office. Similarly, driving a Mercedes S600 was reportedly also forbidden, not because of its value, but because the late President owned such a car. (NOTE: A retired official from the (former) State Committee for Statistics, an acquaintance of one of our local staff, said that he once saw hundreds of brand new, confiscated foreign-made cars parked at the garage of the Ministry of National Security. END NOTE.)

¶4. (SBU) After President Niyazov's death, the streets of Ashgabat were suddenly full of Mercedes, BMWs, even some Cadillacs, many with old series license plates, indicating that the cars had been registered many years before. Their owners, fearing confiscation, had reportedly been afraid to take the cars out of the garage.

¶5. (SBU) COMMENT: The fact that the Porsche was a gift from Shaimiev may be one reason why the owner was able to import it. Berdimuhamedov paid a two-day visit to Tatarstan in late June 2008,

and Shaimiev visited Ashgabat July 5 as part of Russian President Medvedev's visit to the country. Shaimiev and Berdimuhamedov had good bilateral meetings during both visits. It is unlikely that President Berdimuhamedov would want Shaimiev to lose face or would want to cause problems by not allowing a gift from the President of Tatarstan to enter the country. According to Russian diplomats here, Russia wants to encourage close contacts between Tatarstan and Turkmenistan, and believe that the two entities have much in common, including Islamic culture and hydrocarbons.

¶6. (SBU) COMMENT CONTINUED: The Turkmen Government recently purchased 200 new, specially equipped Mercedes C280s at a cost of 70,000 Euros each. By all accounts, however, the few private citizens with the means to purchase high-end cars can still do so only with great difficulty. END COMMENT.

MILES